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ABSTRACT

School leaders are finding that business as usual is no longer an option. This fastback provides a framework for thinking about the multiple demands of school leadership, suggesting that the different models of leadership can be reconciled by considering them to be complementary strategies. The fastback describes the hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative leadership strategies in detail and concludes that no one approach is superior in every situation; the principal's job demands multidimensional performance. Furthermore, there is little conclusive evidence to link a particular leadership strategy with student performance. The conclusion offers broad guidelines for choosing an appropriate strategy: (1) match the strategy to the situation; (2) balance process and product; (3) use actions for more than one purpose; and (4) develop a balanced style. (Contains 30 references). (LMI)

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Multidimensional School Leadership

by
Larry Lashway

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Introduction

These are not easy times for school leaders. Changing student demographics are undermining old assumptions about learning. Public expectations keep rising, but money is tight and the political crossfire is fierce. School leaders are finding that business as usual is no longer an option.

Advice, however, is plentiful. New leadership "paradigms" seem to be everywhere. Management gurus advise leaders to surf the wave, embrace ambiguity, and let their actions be governed by chaos theory.

Most principals remain skeptical. The job seems to demand no-nonsense problem-solving, and they have quite enough chaos in their lives, thank you. In addition, each leadership model seems to contradict the last one. Principals who mastered the 1980s demand for "instructional leadership," with its emphasis on taking charge, now are advised to become "facilitative leaders" by letting go of their authority.

Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy (1993) note that the dominant metaphor for school administration changes every decade or so. In the 1920s school leaders were expected to be "values brokers," promoting time-tested

standards of ethical living. In the 1930s the focus shifted to "scientific management," with the emphasis on rationality and efficiency. In succeeding decades, the models cycled through "democratic leader," "theory-guided administrator," "bureaucratic executive," "humanistic facilitator," and "instructional leader."

School leaders view the changing models with mixed emotions. On the one hand, the promise of new solutions is always welcome. But new models generally are created by nonpractitioners, and administrators often see them as impractical.

Beck and Murphy found that many of the school leadership metaphors used during this century were triggered by social and cultural trends outside of school. In addition, regardless of which leadership theory is most popular at the time, principals remain preoccupied with the day-to-day tasks of running schools, preferring "clear-cut courses of action and observable, controllable outcomes" (Beck and Murphy 1993, p. 199).

This fastback examines three images of leadership that are influencing principals today. My purpose is not to add yet another model or to advocate one over the others, but to provide a framework for thinking about the multiple demands of school leadership. In particular, I will develop the position that the different models can be reconciled by considering them to be complementary strategies.

Leadership Strategies

Over the years, observers have often noted the distinctive ways in which principals cope with the demands of the job. Some are active and assertive, able to project authority just by stepping into a room; others work behind the scenes, preferring quiet conversations to noisy theatrics. Some are down-to-earth and businesslike, concentrating on the problems of the day; others eagerly reach for the future. Some attack problems with sandpaper, hoping to wear out the opposition through sheer abrasion; others are harmonizers, happy to oil whatever squeaky wheels they come across.

These differences have often been explained as "style," a more or less inherent quality that leads people to prefer one way of behaving over another. While these predispositions undoubtedly exist, leaders also operate pragmatically and flexibly, choosing their approach to fit the situation. They do this by adopting particular *strategies*, that is, patterns of behavior designed to gain the cooperation of followers in accomplishing organizational goals. School leaders can choose from at least three basic strategies: hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative.

Hierarchical strategies involve the familiar top-down approach that emphasizes authority, rules, and division of labor. The leader's role is to make decisions and see that they are carried out efficiently.

Transformational strategies seek to move organizations by engaging the beliefs, values, and aspirations of employees. Leaders become highly sensitive to the symbolic meaning of their actions and pay close attention to organizational culture.

Facilitative strategies aim to broaden the leadership base by empowering teachers to take an active role in school decisions. The leader's role is not so much to make good decisions as to see that good decisions are made.

Principals select strategies in response to the complexities of running a school. Their choices are shaped by many factors, but two are especially important: what they notice when they scan the environment, and how they view power.

Strategic Thinking

The life of a school goes on at many levels. Passing a classroom, we see a teacher conducting a discussion, an activity that draws our attention to objectives, outcomes, and lesson plans. But beneath the surface, other dramas are unfolding.

For one thing, the teacher and students did not show up by accident; untold hours of planning, scheduling, book-ordering, and budgeting were needed to deliver them to the same spot at the same time with the proper resources.

Nor can we be sure what the lesson means to the teacher. Perhaps it is an opportunity to open student

minds to the excitement of learning; perhaps it is just another dreary day on the way to retirement. The teacher's approach on any given day may be influenced by the weather, the hour, a mid-life crisis, collegial norms, or labor negotiations.

And what of the students? We may or may not catch the silent dramas behind the scenes: the determined efforts to attract or avoid teacher attention, the bid to catch the eye of the opposite sex, the quiet pride in mastering the skills of a new culture, or the desperate attempt to stay afloat in a sea of intellectual confusion.

Some leaders are able to sense these undercurrents; others are not. Lee Bolman and Terry Deal (1991) have argued that effective leadership requires perceptiveness in four domains, which they call "frames."

1. *The structural frame.* All schools have a formal structure that serves as the backbone for organizational activities, giving everyone an official role defined by rules, policies, and contracts. Through this structure, the school formulates goals, makes plans, and evaluates progress. Leaders who use the structural frame are keenly aware of the rules and use a straightforward, rational approach to planning, supervision, and allocation of resources. In this frame, organizations look like machines, and leadership is a matter of making sure the parts mesh smoothly.

2. *The human resources frame.* The structural frame sees people as anonymous units filling a role, but the reality is that people never stop being people. The leader must be able to recognize and respond appropriately to

the human needs of employees. In the human resources frame, leaders pay close attention to relationships, feelings, and motivation in order to make the workplace congenial and rewarding.

3. *The political frame.* Even the most loyal employees have personal agendas: security, salary, autonomy, and job satisfaction. Since these agendas often clash, people continually jockey to protect what is important to them, lobbying, bargaining, and building coalitions. In the political frame, these tactics are seen as natural and healthy. The leader's problem is not to eliminate conflicts but to resolve them peacefully.

4. *The symbolic frame.* Schools are cultures with myths, heroes, and sacred rituals that ratify the meaning of events. The leader must be sensitive to these cultural dimensions, recognizing, for example, that the Wednesday afternoon social, with its superficial conversation and tepid coffee, is actually a way of smoothing over conflict and reaffirming unity. Leaders using the symbolic frame seek to create organizations with rich, meaningful cultures.

Bolman and Deal (1992) believe that effective leadership requires the use of multiple frames, but they report that only a quarter of the educational leaders they studied used more than two frames and that only one leader in a hundred regularly employed all of them.

Power

Power — the ability to influence people and events — is at the heart of leadership. Principals may hesitate

to use it or wish they had more of it, but they cannot ignore it.

Most discussions of power divide it into two broad types: coercive and moral. Coercive power is the ability to control the environment in a way that will harm or benefit followers. It may be based on raw physical force, on legal consequences, or on material rewards. The rule is simple: Compliance leads to positive consequences, and noncompliance leads to negative consequences.

Moral power comes from respect for the leader's status, expertise, or personal qualities. For example, a principal who has successfully taught first grade usually will have more influence on primary teachers than a principal who has not done so. Moral power explains how such leaders as Martin Luther King Jr. can change history even when they have no coercive power.

Coercive and moral power are sometimes contrasted as "power-over" versus "power-through" (Dunlap and Goldman 1990). In power-over, the leader gets results by directing; followers are just instruments of the leader. By contrast, power-through gives subordinates wide discretion in pursuing organizational goals. The leader gets results indirectly, through the autonomous efforts of others.

Every organization relies on some degree of coercive power; for example, if workers do not show up, they do not get paid. But organizational excellence often is tied to moral power. Coercion gains outward compliance, but moral power leads to performance beyond the call of duty. How principals use power will have a lot to do with the strategies they choose.

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The next sections of this fastback will examine each of the basic leadership strategies.

Hierarchical Strategies

Whatever their philosophy of leadership, principals have to face up to one central fact: By definition, they have coercive power. As official agents of the school district, they are empowered to exercise authority over others.

At the same time, this power is constrained by all kinds of restrictions. Principals are part of a complex organizational machinery that specifies what actions they can take, at what time, and in what manner. Their power over others is limited by the power others have over them.

This kind of hierarchy arises whenever an organization becomes large enough to divide responsibility among different departments. To ensure coordination, the organization establishes clear lines of accountability, resulting in the familiar pyramidal organization chart.

Hierarchy rests on the structural frame of thinking, regarding leadership as a series of technical decisions. It assumes that there is one best way of doing things, and that best way can be identified through careful

analysis by experts. Once the decision has been made, the organization's job is to carry it out as efficiently as possible, each worker doing his or her assigned part.

For the most part, hierarchical power is coercive. Because failure to follow orders undermines the whole organization, noncompliance is cause for disciplinary action. However, in today's organizations, coercive power usually is softened by democratic language or contractual protections. While employees never quite forget the leader's coercive power, they seldom experience it as oppressive. Most accept the need for someone to be in charge, even if they occasionally complain about particular decisions.

American schools traditionally have emphasized efficiency and top-down authority, despite the occasional pleas for democratic leadership. As recently as the 1980s, state-of-the-art leadership models saw the principal as a highly directive leader. For example, Caroline Persell and Peter W. Cookson Jr. (1982) identified nine characteristics of effective principals: demonstrating a commitment to academic goals, creating a climate of high expectations, functioning as an instructional leader, being a forceful and dynamic leader, consulting effectively with others, creating order and discipline, marshaling resources, using time well, and evaluating results. Most of these behaviors fit comfortably in the hierarchical model.

Today, the leading models emphasize facilitation and shared decision making, but the principal's hierarchical accountability remains. When it's time for an accounting, the system still turns to one person.

Advantages

From time to time, critics have challenged the dominance of hierarchical leadership, arguing that top-down approaches are both undemocratic and unproductive. Yet even the most democratically oriented schools have never considered dispensing with it.

The persistence of hierarchical strategies suggests that they satisfy some important needs. Efficiency heads the list. The emphasis on logical decision making and accountability promises a clear path to getting things done. Anyone who shadows a principal for a time will recognize the need for quick and decisive action on the dozens of issues that bubble to the surface every day. Submitting all these issues to collective decision making is a recipe for gridlock.

In addition, hierarchy is built on rules and accountability, which are especially important in public institutions. A hierarchical system provides reasonable assurance that decisions express the will of the people or, if they do not, that there are clear channels for making corrections. In practice, of course, very large hierarchies often develop ways of evading responsibility; an overabundance of rules can actually blur accountability.

Hierarchical strategies also recognize the reality that not all employees behave appropriately. Every organization has its share of slackers, subversives, and incompetents who do not respond to democratic trust. They may constitute a very small minority, but they can have a disruptive influence far out of proportion to their numbers. Someone must have the coercive power to deal with these individuals.

Finally, hierarchical approaches often work because employees prefer to have someone in charge. For most teachers, the idea of running a school entirely by committee seems inefficient, time-consuming, and probably boring. More than anything, teachers want to teach (Lortie 1975).

Limitations

If hierarchical strategies are so powerful, why do they attract so much criticism? Much of the discontent with top-down methods comes from the clumsiness and abuse by leaders. Also, virtues, pushed too far, can become vices. For example, the impartial administration of rules can become insensitivity to individual circumstances; management expertise can turn into arrogance; and order can become rigidity.

But even at its best, hierarchy falls short in some situations. Hierarchical strategies are designed to get compliance, not to create loyalty or spark creativity. The implicit assumption in hierarchy is that "We know how to do things, and the main problem is to get everyone to do what they are supposed to." That may work for routine technical tasks, but teaching does not march to administrative drums. Joseph Shedd and Samuel Bacharach (1991) have pointed out that teachers' roles are extraordinarily complex, involving instruction, counseling, and supervision of students who are highly variable in their needs and capacities. The unpredictability of classrooms calls for skillful improvisation, not standardized solutions. Thus detailed directives from the top simply do not make sense for teaching.

Moreover, while hierarchy promises rationality, schools stubbornly refuse to behave in logical ways. For example:

- Board policy says that the principal allocates supplementary funds, but teachers know the secretary is the person to convince.
- The faculty smoothly reaches agreement on a complete reworking of the science curriculum but erupts over a minor reshuffling of parking spaces.
- Everyone knows that the school's central problem is racial tension; but by tacit agreement, no one talks about it.

No organization chart can adequately capture the richness, complexity, and sheer quirkiness of human behavior.

Finally, hierarchical power has an affinity for the status quo. Hierarchies respond to problems and conflicts by applying time-tested rules; if those rules do not work, the leaders add rules or become more coercive. Creative responses to changed circumstances are difficult. Hierarchical strategies are less effective in turbulent environments.

The Effective Hierarchical Leader

Despite its limitations, the hierarchical approach is common in American schools, and it is difficult to see how it could be ignored. Principals have hierarchical power, and everyone knows it. The only question is how it can be used effectively.

First, effective hierarchical leadership must keep things running smoothly. If the buses are late or the chalk runs low, teachers cannot teach. This is an unglamorous part of the job, but failing to do it well undermines anything else leader hopes to accomplish.

The skills needed here are *managerial*. Principals must look at the school through the "structural frame," that is, they must see the rules, relationships, and resources that will move things from point A to point B on schedule — and then act decisively. Some decisions are routine (scheduling achievement tests, submitting budgets, conducting fire drills) while others are ad hoc (soothing an angry parent, breaking up a fight, handling a media inquiry). Some decisions must be negotiated with others, but it remains the principal's responsibility to see the need and push for resolution.

Second, hierarchy assumes that the person at the top is able to see the diverse parts of the organization and to coordinate their work. This is especially important in schools; teachers are specialists, preoccupied with doing their own work in their own classrooms, and they have little time for coordinating their efforts with others.

Thus principals must ask questions that no one else will ask. Do the elementary and middle school math programs mesh smoothly? Are inconsistent discipline standards sending mixed messages to students? Is there a better way of scheduling pull-outs to avoid disruption of regular classes?

Coordination includes setting goals. Schools constantly are pulled and pushed by cultural and political pressures that can deflect them from their path. No

sooner has one set of goals been adopted then some new social crisis shoves them into the background. The principal must be keeper of the compass, bringing the school on course whenever pressure has forced it to deviate.

Finally, leaders must be willing to use their coercive power. For reasons that are both philosophical and [illegible]logical, many principals hesitate; coercion seems [illegible]ocratic and raises the risk of confrontation. But [illegible]mployees consistently fail to follow rules or meet [illegible]pectations, leaders must act. When they decline their power to solve obvious problems, the problems not only persist, but employees are demoralized.

At the same time, principals must use coercive power sensitively, recognizing its potentially corrosive effects. The need to act decisively is not a license to treat people as objects, especially in an institution that is filled with idealists. Coercive power can never be disguised, but its use can be softened in a number of ways:

- Simple warmth and friendliness can create a positive climate that helps offset negative feelings when coercion must be used.
- Even when principals make a unilateral decision, they can make a point of asking teachers for input. As long as their ideas are considered seriously, teachers actually may prefer that principals make the decision.
- Coercive power need not be flaunted. Linguist Deborah Tannen (1994) has noted that an indirect verbal style can take some of the sting out of directives. For example, if the principal says, "I've been get-

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ting some phone calls from parents about their kids missing the late bus," most coaches would get the message; but they would understand without the bludgeoning effect of a direct order ("From now on, practices will end on time").

Transformational Strategies

For many people, true leadership transcends routine management. Whereas *managers* deal with mundane decisions and operate through policies, committees, and top-down directives, *leaders* are inspirational, reaching for the future with bold visions.

James McGregor Burns (1978) has crystallized this viewpoint with his description of "transformational leadership," which relies on persuasion, idealism, and intellectual excitement, rather than coercion. Leaders get results by convincing followers that their deepest values can be fulfilled through the organization's agenda.

Burns distinguishes between leaders who are truly transformational (elevating followers to higher levels of motivation and morality) and those who are merely manipulative. For Burns, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech was transformational; Adolf Hitler's equally powerful speeches were not.

Transformational leaders are highly self-confident; they know what they want and are convinced they can get it. Their insight into human nature makes them

skillful motivators. They are great actors, able to add drama and flair to the rites of leadership. And, perhaps most important, they create hope for the future, generating commitment, enthusiasm, and energy.

The confidence and grace of these leaders often is characterized as "charisma," but their success is not due solely to personality. Transformational strategies spring from what leaders believe and do, not merely from personal charm.

What they do, above all else, is to view organizations through the symbolic frame. They recognize that people want more from their work than a paycheck, that workers seek meaning and purpose. They understand that organizations are cultures in which shared values are expressed in stories, rituals, and ceremonies. They realize the moral power that comes from articulating the group's common values.

With this understanding, leaders can translate deeply felt needs (even those that are unvoiced or inarticulate) into vivid images that will stir people to action. Howard Gardner (1995) calls this "story-telling"; for example, Martin Luther King Jr. told a story of ordinary people vanquishing oppression through steadfast, courageous, nonviolent action. Leaders who tell such stories — and embody them in their lives — are transformational.

Advantages

The most obvious advantage of transformational strategies is their ability to motivate and inspire followers. When workers view their jobs as purely economic

transactions, their commitment is limited. When they see the job as a way of achieving deeply felt values, their commitment and performance move to a new level.

Schools probably have more transformational potential than do many other organizations, simply because so many educators enter the field as a way of satisfying their idealism. Even experienced teachers are motivated by "psychic rewards," such as seeing the light bulb go on in the child's eyes (Lortie 1975).

This idealism often is threatened by classroom realities. Classrooms are crowded, budgets are tight, and students have needs that teachers were never trained to meet. Even worse, some schools seem to resist innovation and stifle creativity. Often, hopes are submerged in a rising tide of cynicism.

According to Roland Barth (1990), the idealistic core never disappears. People may keep it in the closet, but "the vision is there." It resurfaces when principals with confidence and energy remind teachers why they entered the field and convince them that those goals still can be achieved.

Transformational leadership is especially valuable in times of crisis, when events threaten to overwhelm the institution. At those moments, employees are particularly receptive to messages that clarify the confusion and provide hope for the future.

Schools engaged in restructuring also have a special need for transformational leadership. Reinventing a school is never just a matter of shuffling schedules or realigning curriculum; lasting change requires a change in the whole school culture. Teachers who have seen

many reforms come and go tend to be skeptical of new initiatives, even small-scale ones; committing to fundamental restructuring requires a leap of faith. When the principal can point to a vision that embodies teachers' deepest ideals, and then backs that vision with energy and optimism, the future begins to look achievable.

Limitations

Descriptions of transformational leadership typically offer such role models as John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Gandhi, and Jesus. Is it reasonable to expect all leaders to reach this level? Some research suggests that transformational leaders may be relatively rare (Kirby, Paradise, and King 1992; Bolman and Deal 1992).

Kenneth Leithwood (1993) notes that transformational strategies require highly developed intellectual skills and a well-defined values system. Principals not only must know the school culture well enough to identify and solve current problems, they also must be able to look beyond the demands of moment and see the school as it might be. These skills are not acquired easily.

Ironically, strong transformational leadership may carry the seeds of its own destruction. According to Jay Conger (1989), charismatic leaders sometimes become infatuated with their success, and confidence mutates into arrogance. Their visions become off-handed; their excellent communication skills are used to manipulate others; and they become careless about everyday management practices.

Transformational strategies also create high expectations that cannot be easily maintained, especially when

change is slow to come. Martin Luther King Jr. was criticized and even abandoned by some of his followers who felt he was being too timid or too accommodating with the white power structure. School leaders are part of the establishment, and they are expected to show loyalty to the system even as they try to transform it. Thus transformational leaders must carefully modulate their message, being bold enough to inspire others but not so bold that they unleash forces that cannot be managed

Finally, transformational leadership usually is associated with change. Once a school has created a new structure, what happens? Can intellectual excitement be maintained over a long period, or do people reach a plateau where they need to settle in and assimilate the changes? Do transformational leaders then move on to new jobs? So far, the answers are not clear.

The Effective Transformational Leader

Few principals would put themselves in the same league as John Kennedy or Winston Churchill. (Those who do are undoubtedly on the superintendent track.) However, while charisma is unquestionably an asset, transformational strategies are built on behaviors that are within the reach of most leaders.

First, principals who use transformational strategies identify and articulate a clear organizational vision (Leithwood 1993). While all leaders formulate goals, vision goes much farther. Terry Deal and Kent Peterson (1994) characterize it as listening carefully for "the deeper dreams." They say, "Every school is a repository of

unconscious sentiments, expectations, and hopes that carry the code of the collective dream — the high ground to which they collectively aspire."

Principals must be able to hear these dreams and shape them into a believable, achievable goal. Fortunately, this does not require heroic intellectual feats, only a willingness to keep asking, "If this is what we believe, what should we be doing about it?" The specifics will come from teachers, once they have become convinced that the leader is serious about change. Visions are ultimately *collective* products. The principal's role is to be the voice of conscience that keeps whispering, "We aren't yet all that we can be."

A second transformational strategy is fostering the acceptance of group goals — persuading employees to rally around the common cause. This requires a new look at the teacher's relationships with the institution. In traditional organizations, relationships are based on contracts, which specify legal obligations in terms of material transactions, that is, so many dollars for so many hours of work. By contrast, transformational relationships are built on *covenants* growing from shared values.

Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) says that such covenants are developed through continual dialogue that *explicitly* considers the values, beliefs, and behaviors that unite the school community. Covenants sometimes take visible form in a written statement of beliefs, but in all cases they are more than just idealistic rhetoric. Instead, they are regarded as standards to which everyone in the school will be held accountable. When these basic standards are violated, principals must "lead by outrage."

A third strategy is providing appropriate models. As the most carefully watched people in the school, principals are expected to live out the visions they promote; even routine activities will be interpreted in light of whatever sermons have been preached. Principals send important messages by how they use their time, how they arrange and decorate their office, whom they reward, and how they relate to teachers, students, and parents. In the end, vision is as vision does.

A fourth strategy is providing intellectual stimulation. A vital school culture feeds on a continuous flow of knowledge, reflection, and inquiry. Principals can nurture this exchange with actions as simple as routing a journal article to teachers or holding a two-minute hallway conversation about a new web site. They also must find ways to budget for conferences, to form curriculum development task forces, and to schedule visits to other schools.

In promoting new ideas, principals will succeed to the degree they are ready to back words with action. Carol Weiss (1995) notes that teachers are skeptical of "ed school stuff," ideas that have been promulgated by ivory tower theoreticians and appropriated by ambitious administrators. Teachers know full well that they will be the ones who have to figure out the messy details of getting the idea to work in an actual classroom. Principals who provide concrete support — time, training, and funding — are far more likely to see the new ideas take root.

A final transformational strategy is nurturing a strong school culture that supports and exemplifies the

guiding values. Doing so requires leaders to use the symbolic frame, looking beneath surface events to understand how others interpret school life.

Here again it may be small acts that have the biggest long-term effect: giving recognition to those who support the school's core values; telling stories that connect the school's past, present, and future; and finding room for the idiosyncratic little rituals and celebrations that bind people together (Stolp and Smith 1995).

Facilitative Strategies

One of the oldest debates in the leadership arena poses a stark question: Can leaders be democratic? The issue has troubled Americans for most of this century. On the one hand, traditional organizations have always operated from the top down, an arrangement that seems both logical and efficient. On the other hand, this seems to conflict with democratic ideals that revere individual autonomy and decision making. Consequently, leaders often have looked for ways to operate more democratically.

The most recent expression of this goal is facilitative leadership, which seeks to distribute leadership throughout the organization, rather than vest it in one person. The facilitative approach does not formally overturn the hierarchical structure, but it does try to move the nominal leader (the one with legal authority) from the top to the middle, where he or she can draw others into the decision-making process. Facilitative leaders are willing to give up some of their power *over* people in exchange for exercising power *through* people.

David Conley and Paul Goldman (1994) define facilitative leadership as "the behaviors that enhance the collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems,

and improve performance." The key word here is "collective"; organizations are thought to work best when all employees play an active role in solving problems. The leader's responsibility is to nurture that kind of participation.

Seen in action, facilitative decision making is flexible, dynamic, and unpredictable. It differs from delegation, where the leader unilaterally assigns tasks to subordinates. In a facilitative environment, anyone can initiate a task and recruit anyone else to participate. The process thrives on informal negotiation and nonstop communication; it also requires principals to use the political frame by identifying key players, determining their needs, and negotiating an accommodation.

Underlying these actions is a firm commitment to trust, "a 'letting go' of control and an increasing belief that others can and will function independently and successfully within a common framework of expectations and accountability" (Conley and Goldman 1994, p. 38).

Advantages

Facilitative strategies seem tailor-made for schools, since the core activities of teaching and learning already are decentralized. Administrative edicts can set curricula, choose textbooks, and determine schedules; but only teachers and students, working together in their own space, can produce learning. It simply makes sense to bring decision making closer to that level.

Facilitation also helps break down the professional isolation that has always plagued teachers. Not only

does the structure of the school day make collaboration difficult, collegial norms of "live and let live" often discourage teachers from mutually confronting core instructional practices (Griffin 1995). Facilitation makes it more likely that teachers will discuss substantive issues in a professional context; it leads them to see the values and behaviors that connect their classroom with the larger life of the school; and it encourages them to take ownership for schoolwide problems.

While Conley and Goldman stress that facilitation is aimed at improved student learning and is not an end in itself, others say that democratic leadership has inherent value in a democratic society. Joseph and Jo Roberts Blase (1994) argue that teachers have a right to the respect and dignity that come with participation and that empowerment leads to greater satisfaction and commitment.

Interestingly, some research has found a link between administrative leadership strategies and classroom teaching strategies. Linda McNeil (1986) found that highly directive high school principals seemed to have schools that were dominated by a lecture-and-quiz approach. Evidently, the heavy breath of administrative control discouraged teachers from using more innovative — but riskier — methods. Empowered teachers may be more willing to experiment.

Limitations

Facilitative strategies challenge normal assumptions about leadership, raising questions for everyone. Princi-

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pals trained to take decisive action may find it difficult to bite their tongue as teachers spin their wheels. Teachers may refuse to believe that principals are serious about sharing leadership. Parents and board members may wonder who is really in charge.

The key dilemma for principals is walking the tightrope between sharing power and abdicating power. Whatever the rhetoric about shared leadership, most school systems still hold one person responsible for results. Principals may wonder about the wisdom of entrusting so much to those who will not share the accountability.

Middle ground is hard to find. In her study of shared decision making, Nona Prestine (1993) discovered that active participation by principals was crucial. If they simply turned over the decisions to faculty and walked away, teachers interpreted it as a lack of interest — a signal that the process should not be treated too seriously. Yet enthusiastic participation could be taken as a sign of business as usual, with the principal in control. Somehow principals must find a way to participate without dominating. "Sometimes I have ideas," one principal explained, "but I have to wait for the right time. I can't just go in and tell them what I think" (Prestine 1993, p. 368).

Even when teachers believe the principal is sincere about sharing power, they may shy away from taking responsibility, sensing that they are about to be sucked into schoolwide controversies from which they normally are buffered. Nor do they appreciate the frequent committee meetings that pull them away from teaching.

Conversely, teachers may overreach in their exercise of leadership. Prestine found that some teachers push

administrators to the margins of decision making. One said: "There are decisions that don't affect us, I mean as teachers. And I don't think we really care if he makes those decisions, like keeping the building at 68.3 degrees. . . . But I think the decisions that affect program, those need to be made by the teachers involved" (Prestine 1993, p. 369).

Principals also face another difficulty: reconciling the unpredictable pace of facilitation with the inflexible demands of the hierarchical system. Shared leadership is often a slow-motion process, especially while participants are learning their new roles. Meanwhile, the system continues to impose its normal demands and deadlines. For example, a proposal to replace basal readers with a whole-language approach is likely to generate a wide-ranging debate that deserves a full airing, yet looming over the process is an arbitrary requisition deadline. Some days, principals must allow the issues to play themselves out; other days, they must say, "It's time to move on."

Finally, as with transformational strategies, facilitation may create great excitement and high expectations, unleashing multiple initiatives that stretch resources, drain energy, and fragment the collective vision. Somehow the principal must keep a hand on the reins without discouraging the innovators (Conley and Goldman 1994).

The Effective Facilitative Leader

The challenges described above are formidable; we can safely assume that most school leaders who operate

facilitatively will sometimes find themselves groping for the right approach. However, there is enough research to let us piece together a picture of the facilitative leader at work (Hord 1992; Conley and Goldman 1994; Blase and Blase 1994; Blase et al. 1995).

First, facilitative leaders express confidence that teachers are capable of leadership, and they back up that faith with concrete gestures. Some steps are obvious, such as establishing task-oriented committees and empowering them to make certain decisions. Other moves may be more subtle, for example:

- Taking two minutes to listen to a teacher describe her idea for the tardiness problem and then asking, "What would it take to test that out?"
- Frequently asking questions that begin, "What if we. . . ?"
- Allocating money to send two teachers to a conference related to their experiment with authentic assessment.
- Finding a loophole in district policies that will allow a school curriculum committee to make a desired change.

In short, facilitative strategies create an atmosphere and a culture for change.

Facilitation requires leaders to take on many roles: mediator, ambassador, knowledgeable resource, negotiator, cheerleader, skillful manager, and supportive colleague. Somehow, they must strike just the right balance between aggressive action and watchful waiting. Simply delegating a task and walking away will be

interpreted as indifference. Yet pressing too hard on an issue will be viewed as a return to top-down decision making.

Facilitation sends principals in many directions at once, but they stay centered on a guiding vision. This vision is not their sole creation, but a product of the entire school community, something that evolves through dozens of daily encounters. Leaders must be guardians of the vision, willing to ask, "Are we getting off-track here?" Simultaneously, they must let the vision breathe as experience provides new insights. Above all, they must keep the conversation alive.

Facilitative leaders are continually engaged in evaluation, monitoring and checking progress. Hord notes that nothing goes exactly as planned, requiring leaders to shift gears, adapt, redeploy, and change direction. The need to keep in touch requires them to be out and about on a daily basis, chatting, observing, questioning.

At times, facilitation leads principals to use their traditional authority in creative ways to support teachers as they struggle to change. This may involve clearing away some of the policy underbrush, directing money where it will have maximum impact, and most of all, freeing time for faculty members to do what needs to be done. Facilitative principals understand that change and collaboration require deep personal changes, so they make training and development a major priority.

Finally, facilitators take the long view. They know that real change does not occur overnight, and they recognize that there are ups and downs in any change process. Typically, the early rush of enthusiasm is tempered by

unexpected obstacles; a seemingly successful plan suddenly falls apart; key people burn out. Facilitative principals help staff members through the low spots, encouraging them to recognize progress and celebrating major achievements.

Most of all, they know that "change is a process, not an event." Individuals must change before the institution can change, and they do so in different ways and at different rates. Facilitators must adapt their strategies to these individual variations.

Multidimensional Leadership

Hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative strategies present school leaders with a set of very different options — and some knotty questions. Should principals seek to become a certain type of leader? If so, which type is best? Or is it better to use different strategies at different times? Under what conditions should each strategy be employed?

First, remember that leadership models often are created by theoreticians. Thus we should ask whether the three strategies are meaningful descriptions of what actually happens in school settings. With some qualifications, the answer appears to be "yes." We do have studies that show principals acting in ways that could be described as hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative; anyone familiar with schools could undoubtedly add personal examples.

However, we do not know much about the relative frequency of these strategies. Hierarchical leadership is undoubtedly widespread, but the status of the newer approaches is less certain. Studies of transformational

and facilitative leadership often have focused on small numbers of subjects, leaving us unsure whether they are pioneers of an emerging paradigm or just rugged individualists.

Nor do we know much about patterns of usage. Do principals gravitate toward a particular model, or do they move flexibly from one strategy to another, depending on the needs of the situation? The strategies are not mutually exclusive; for example, we know that even principals committed to facilitative leadership sometimes consciously use hierarchical behaviors (Blase et al. 1995). However, it is too soon to draw firm conclusions from the empirical literature alone. Instead, in the following discussion I will attempt to synthesize what we can learn from theory, research, and the nature of today's education environment. The result will be a somewhat idealized — but not unrealistic — portrait of what I call a "multidimensional leader."

Types or Strategies?

Principals are often urged to become a certain *type* of leader, implying that leadership strategies are qualitatively different (and mutually exclusive). Is that the case, or can leaders pick and choose different strategies at different times?

Clearly, some principals consciously seek to develop a certain kind of leadership as a matter of philosophy. One middle school principal put it this way:

> I'm a social studies teacher, and I believe in the democratic process. . . . When democracy works the way it

should, the more ideas you've got in there and the more open-forum discussions about the pros and cons of the ways to do things, then — I really believe that in the final analysis — you're going to come out with a decision that works best for everybody. (Blase et al. 1995, p. 111)

We also can imagine that some leaders are predisposed (by personality or experience) to operate in a certain mode. Robert Kaplan (1996), discussing the roots of "enabling leadership" (similar to facilitation), suggests that some leaders are drawn to that approach because of a deeply rooted reluctance to impose their will on others. Other leaders may be drawn to transformational approaches simply because they have the personal traits and verbal skills that make these strategies work.

These natural tendencies are reinforced by intellectual trends. For example, hierarchical leadership currently is out of favor, and principals are being told they should reinvent themselves as transformational or facilitative leaders (Beck and Murphy 1993). For all these reasons, it should not be surprising that some leaders develop an overall style in which one strategy is dominant, or at least is more visible.

But there are good reasons to be wary of a single-strategy approach. For one thing, there is no clear evidence that one approach is superior in every situation, or even in similar situations at different times. For example, there are correlational studies that link facilitative and transformational leadership to positive teacher attitudes and school climate (Leithwood 1993), but the same was true of the more hierarchical instructional leadership in the 1980s.

There also is little conclusive evidence to link a particular leadership strategy with student performance, nor is there likely to be such evidence for a long time. Leadership is a second-order variable; whatever magic it may work on teachers, it does not directly affect students, who do their learning in the classroom, not in the principal's office. The relationship between leadership and learning is extraordinarily complex; finding conclusive links is an elusive goal under the best of circumstances.

The other reason for doubting single-strategy approaches is the complexity of the school environment. It is difficult to imagine principals being able to get by with only one strategy in their repertoire. On most days, they have to shift gears from one hour to the next: at 1 o'clock cautioning an employee about excessive absences, at 2 o'clock chatting with a teacher about an upcoming conference, and at 3 o'clock sitting quietly in a committee meeting as teachers decide how to spend next year's state grant. Whatever the principal's personal inclinations, the school demands multidimensional performance.

Where this leaves principals is where they usually are found: on the firing line, trying to balance the needs of students, teachers, and themselves while making practical judgments each day about which course of action to follow. In that complex environment, different demands call for different strategies. For example:

- As a skeptical public demands results, principals must keep the current system running efficiently. That calls for a hierarchical strategy.

- The push for restructuring demands principals who can see a different future and get others to commit themselves to new directions. That calls for a transformational strategy.
- Escalating expectations make it virtually impossible for the principal, no matter how talented, to do everything; an expanded leadership pool is almost mandatory. That calls for a facilitative strategy.

No single strategy is likely to meet all these needs. For the foreseeable future, principals will continue to draw on multiple strategies.

Choosing a Strategy

Multidimensional leadership implies that principals must be able to choose the right strategy at the right time. While there are no recipes for making such decisions, several broad guidelines are useful.

1. Match the strategy to the situation.

By now, most principals are familiar with the concept of "situational leadership," which calls for leaders to adapt their style to the needs of followers. For example, workers with high skill and high confidence can be delegated a task and left alone; workers with low skill and low confidence require strong direction from the top (Hersey and Blanchard 1993).

Some critics accuse the Hersey-Blanchard system of being too formulaic, but the underlying idea is consistent with what we know about school culture: Every school has a unique "personality" based on its history,

values, and philosophical assumptions. What works in one setting will misfire in another (a lesson often learned by principals who transfer to a new building).

Thus schools with a history of strong hierarchical authority may find it difficult to jump into facilitative approaches; schools with a history of faculty involvement may rebel when the principal unilaterally makes a decision (even one with which the faculty agrees). Principals who take over schools in disarray (high absenteeism, poor discipline, and low test scores) probably will do best with a combination of hierarchical leadership (to build confidence that someone is in control) and transformational leadership (to give hope for the future). Later, as the school becomes more stable, it may be time to move toward more facilitative strategies.

The kind of problem also makes a difference. Ronald Heifetz (1994) observes that some problems are technical: The issue is well-defined and the solution is clear; anyone with appropriate expertise can make the decision. For example, if members of the school community agree that the annual achievement test should accurately reflect the content of the curriculum, the actual choice can be made by administrators. At other times the problem is well understood but there is no obvious solution, or the problem itself is poorly understood (such as an increasingly negative tone in student attitudes). Here a more participative approach may work better, simply because the leader does not have the answer. Sometimes, says Heifetz, organizations must collectively "learn their way forward."

Unfortunately, there are no easy formulas for analyzing situations, and surface appearances can be mis-

leading. Seemingly technical decisions can have hidden cultural meanings. For example, a decision to combine high school music, art, and English teachers into a single "humanities" department may have impeccable logic; but it also could threaten the way that teachers in those subjects define themselves. The only way to avoid being tripped up by such problems is to know the school thoroughly, which requires the leader to engage in relentless communication with all stakeholders.

2. Balance process and product.

Strategic choices involve tradeoffs between process and product. Much of the enthusiasm for facilitative strategies comes from the energy unleashed when teachers become empowered, but these potentially powerful changes may not lead to improved student learning. Some studies suggest that empowerment is a necessary, but not sufficient, step toward significant changes in core classroom practices (Elmore, Peterson, and McCarthey 1996).

It is easy to get caught up in the kind of energized collegial culture that comes with empowerment, and an improved work climate may have inherent value. However, principals are responsible for protecting the welfare of students; and it may be necessary at times to take hierarchical actions that risk upsetting the empowerment process. One principal put it this way:

> My responsibility as a principal really is to the children, and if I see areas that are ineffective, I've got to say that we're not effective here and that we have got to change. (Blase et al. 1995, p. 24)

3. Use actions for more than one purpose.

The same action can serve more than one strategy. Deal and Peterson (1994) advocate "bifocal vision" that accomplishes several goals simultaneously. For example, supervising bus arrivals serves an obvious hierarchical function, but it also presents a transformational opportunity for greeting students, establishing visibility, assessing social climate, and reinforcing key school values. Similarly, budgeting not only allocates resources, it sends unmistakable messages about institutional values. And faculty meetings can be used not just to make announcements but to build a common sense of meaning and purpose.

4. Develop a balanced style.

Kaplan (1996) has found that leaders often hurt themselves — and others — by overreliance on one strategy. The preferred approach is usually an area of strength, but excessive use may turn any virtue into a vice. Leaders should train themselves to be versatile, periodically venturing out of their comfort zones to try a new strategy. Kaplan concedes this is difficult. As an alternative, he recommends developing a leadership *team* that has strategic versatility.

Nowhere do the strategic dilemmas of leadership show up more starkly than in the practice of shared decision making. On the surface, the strategic implications seem clear: shared decision making calls for facilitation. Yet shared decision making actually calls for the skillful use of all three strategies.

Facilitation is obviously essential; a principal who does not believe in the power of shared leadership will

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not do much sharing. However, hierarchical strategies also are very important. Leaders must know the institutional boundaries; and if district policies and politics put certain issues off limits, that should be clearly communicated to faculty at the outset. In addition, the need for transformational strategies also should be obvious, because shared decision making is a major shift in the way schools operate.

Thus, even as shared decision making requires a leadership model that is unmistakably facilitative, it also requires principals to use hierarchical and transformational strategies. Managing these dilemmas is a delicate balancing act. But this reform and others demonstrate that, for the foreseeable future, schools will require leaders who are multidimensional.

Is Multidimensional Leadership a Realistic Goal?

Like many of the leadership images offered to principals, multidimensional leadership is an attractive concept; yet it is reasonable to ask whether it represents a realistic goal. Hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative strategies require very different talents. By asking for multidimensionality, are we asking for the impossible?

Admittedly, leaders who excel in all dimensions are relatively rare. But the model calls only for competence, not perfection. Principals may not be able to speak with the passion and eloquence of Martin Luther King Jr., but they can stand in front of the faculty and give voice to the values for which the school stands. They may not have the technical mastery of a Bill Gates, but they can figure out what needs to be done and when it needs to be done. They may not have the zest and affability of Teddy Roosevelt, but they can take steps that will make the school a more congenial and stimulating environ-

ment. At some level, multidimensional leadership is within everyone's grasp.

Another reasonable concern is whether multidimensional leaders confuse their followers through inconsistency. A common view of effective leadership is that it gives clear, consistent messages about the leader's intent. Deal and Peterson (1994) argue that, contrary to expectations, this is not true. At least some leaders are able to send apparently conflicting messages that somehow are seen as harmonious. Tony Wagner describes one such principal:

> Ruben's leadership style is complex. He believes in teachers and knows that they cannot be "made" to change or grow, nor can meaningful programs be developed without teachers' active involvement. But. . . Ruben doesn't sit and wait for teachers to come along with good ideas. He prods, he cajoles, he argues, he inspires, he sometimes even manipulates — all means to the end of encouraging teachers to rethink and reassess their work. (Wagner 1994, p. 101)

Despite this hands-on, assertive approach, this principal's teachers repeatedly affirmed that they felt empowered, respected, and trusted, perhaps because Ruben's underlying values were always clear. Examples such as this suggest that we may be underrating the ability of people to live with shifting strategies.

Deal and Peterson also make the point that school leadership is mired in paradox, and principals might as well embrace it. They cite a principal whose teachers always knew what was expected of them on a day-to-day basis, yet felt free to shape their own roles. Similarly,

this principal expected people to do things right, yet he tolerated mistakes made in the cause of improvement and promoted pride in accomplishments without becoming complacent. Deal and Peterson cite a long list of such apparent oppositions in school leadership.

Their advice is simple: Leaders who embrace the paradox can ultimately come closer to harmony. By accepting that life is complex and not always logical, leaders not only can operate more effectively, they also are likely to experience less of the tension that comes from trying to reshape a world that does not want to change its shape.

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